

# DRAFT - SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

*This is a draft document based on the principles and guidelines of Robert's Rules of Order. Note that it applies to internal discussion within the body, and does not address public comment, which has different guidelines.*

*Please send your suggestions to [ann@jurassicparliament.com](mailto:ann@jurassicparliament.com). Thank you!*

1.	The chair of the meeting (mayor, council president, board chair etc.) runs the meeting in the service of the body. The chair serves as the facilitator for the meeting. The chair maintains order but may not dominate discussion or decision-making. The chair may not lecture or criticize the members. The chair has the primary responsibility of enforcing these guidelines.
2.	All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations. To ensure this, no one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.
3.	Members will seek recognition from the chair before speaking. The chair will recognize people according to the guidelines. In general, interrupting is not allowed.
4.	During business meetings all remarks must be addressed to the chair, and members may not speak directly to each other. <i>Note: This method seems formal but has the benefit of keeping discussion to the topic at hand and making it less personal.</i>
5.	During work study sessions or committee meetings, members may speak in conversational mode, in which members speak without recognition and to each other. The chair will ensure that everyone has an equal chance to speak and no individual dominates the discussion.
6.	Members may address presenters directly once recognized by the chair. Questions for presenters or staff may not devolve into lengthy exchanges.

7.	Discussion should be focused on the issues at hand. Members may not campaign or grandstand from the dais. <i>Note: Some elected officials believe that it is important that members have the right to explain to the audience why they are voting as they are. Others are in favor of adopting a rule that members of the body may not speak directly to the audience.</i>
8.	Members may not paraphrase remarks made by other members.
9.	Remarks must either “for” or “against” the motion being considered. <i>Note: Some elected officials find this requirement too restrictive.</i>
10.	A member may not speak against their own motion. If discussion has changed a member’s mind, the member may ask permission to withdraw the motion.
11.	Personal remarks about other members are not allowed, except for conflict of interest issues.
12.	Remarks must be courteous and respectful. Insults, personal attacks, vulgarity or obscenity are not allowed. Members may not criticize the body.
13.	Inflammatory language is not allowed.
14.	Remarks criticizing past actions of the body are not allowed, unless the body as a whole is discussing the topic, or the member is about to introduce a motion to amend (change) or rescind (cancel) the action at the end of their speech.
15.	Remarks must be germane (relevant) to the topic at hand.
16.	The body is the final authority as to whether remarks are permissible under these guidelines.
17.	If a guideline is broken or a question arises as to whether a remark is allowed under the guidelines, a member may make a Point of Order. The chair rules, subject to Appeal. The chair may also turn to the body immediately to decide the matter. A Point of Order must be made at the time of the offense.

18.	If necessary to enforce a guideline, the chair may interrupt a member. A member may interrupt a speaker in order to make a Point of Order. Since interruptions are disruptive, this should be done infrequently.
19.	The chair may take part in discussion, but may not use their position to answer each individual speaker.
20.	When discussing substantive questions, the chair will usually speak and vote, if entitled to vote, after others have spoken. <i>Note: Opinions differ as to whether it is a good idea to have the chair speak last. On the one hand, this can promote impartiality. On the other, it could be seen as giving the chair an unfair advantage in defining the issues.</i>
21.	Individual speeches are limited to a maximum of 5 minutes. The body may adopt a shorter limit, or an overall time limit for a given topic, by a two-thirds vote without debate. If a speaker runs over the limit, the chair will interrupt and request that they conclude their remarks.
22.	Members will give their full attention to their colleagues and will put away their cell phones, unless in an emergency situation.
23.	The motion “Previous Question” or “Call the Question” requires a second and a two-thirds vote, without debate, in order to cut off discussion and vote immediately on the pending motion. Members may not call out “Question!” but must be recognized in order to make this motion.
24.	These guidelines are in effect unless superseded by law, ordinance, regulation, or adopted policy. <i>Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised, latest edition</i> is the parliamentary authority.